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Rivers + Radiators #3

Project #23

Prokiev:
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Rivers + Radiators. Sometimes things seem to happen naturally and easily. Other times we feel trapped, caught in the artifice, mental cabin fever. Rivers move life and water through nature, radiators move hot water through pipes to heat dwellings. I've sat at the river, letting my mind go blank and breathing in fresh air, getting sand in my shoes. I've sat at the radiator, obsessively imagining, watching fat flakes of snow fall on cars. Rivers and Radiators effect the life around them, alter the habitat. One carries your thoughts to the ocean, letting in new ones. The other simmers and circulates, pressing your mind against the window, where the edge of the world begins.

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I used to live alone in a one-room apartment. The whole idea appealed to me: the young loner with his own corner of the world, tucked into the stairwell of an old brownstone, the bed in one corner, the couch in the other, living off of Jack's Mexican Style pizza and cans of Leinenkugel's... I was there for two years. Then my thoughts started to bother me. I started dating again, which I wasn't known to do. I worried a lot, and daydreamed a lot. I stayed up at night staring at the ceiling. I didn't have a lot of money to go out, but I wasn't relaxed enough to be by myself all the time either. So in June 2003, two of my friends and I moved into the second floor of 2528 Pleasant Avenue South, Minneapolis MN, 55404, along with my friends' cousin and his friend from back home.

Our place was pretty typical of what you'd imagine four to six males under the age of 30 living together would be like. The kitchen was always a mess, the fridge was filled with condiments and take-out, books and CDs seemed to plant themselves wherever they felt, ashtrays overflowing, strangers showing up all the time. Then there were the quirks. One time I walked into the kitchen and noticed a turd plopped comfortably in my ashtray. The voicemail always filled up with messages in Arabic, French and/or Berber (three of my roommates were Algerian.) We got a cat that meowed constantly, hid under all the junk in our basement, and always pooped about four inches away from his litter box.

I worked two crappy jobs—both of them part time. Real working-class type jobs. One in a print shop and one doing remodeling. I bet all I would have to do is pull up outside that house at six in the evening and I'd feel instantly lethargic.

My roommate Will and I started referring to the house as Afunctionul Headquarters pretty immediately upon moving in, although by that time even, Afunctionul was Kaput. While I was living alone in my little apartment, and going to school at the U of M, we had a group that would range from 5 to 15 people at any given time. That was Afunctionul. It's a difficult thing to explain because we didn't have a mission or anything, we were just kind of there, and whatever common bonds we shared just kind of ended up making things happen. For instance, in 2001 and 2002 we "crashed" the Uptown Art Fair—this ridiculously gentrified and corporatized outdoor visual arts festival in the increasingly yuppie and decreasingly bohemian sector of Minneapolis known as Uptown. We took an empty booth, made up performances on the spot, and gave away free art. We had a number of art shows which went on alongside performance events and zine releases. We had a writer's workshop group, held loosely moderated meetings, we traded zines and CDs, and we frequented whatever open mic's Will happened to have been hosting. Will was the performer, Sanaphay was the writer, and I was the artist. The three of us constituted the core founding members. Other ever-present loyals included Valerie Valentine, Cory Kalinoski, Adam Ridgeway, Sarah Wash, and later on

Tammy Wang and Nicole Jensen. Our high point was an exhibit entitled "Free Air: Limbs and Loopholes," at the Rogue Buddha Gallery, which is represented by the zine "Apercu #3," and documented in "Apercu #4."

I used to describe Afunctionul as an artist's network. Others characterized it as a movement, like Fluxus, or Dadaism. Then others referred to it as a company or an organization, like a record label or a zine distro, or an art gallery. Afunctionul was in a sense all of those things and still none of those things: a gallery/distro/label without a space or a budget, a movement without a message, style or theme. I now think of us as a clique. A college social circle—a group of people who shared a similar place in time and locality, and who shifted gradually out of view. People went their separate ways. They graduated and got jobs, moved to other cities, made new friends, etc. We gave our clique a name and tried to market it, for one reason: we were all artists. We saw an opportunity to do more than just hang out in cafes and go to parties. We hung our art and read our poems in those cafes, we threw our own parties. Then we started showing in galleries, and we started going to galleries, and we made zines and music. It still doesn't stop us from being a clique. We just had more intense, and more public, pastimes.

When I was in high school, I didn't have many friends. I knew a few people, and they ended up hanging out between classes underneath the stairwell at the foot of the A-Wing. Their acquaintances also got to know people who also started gravitating there. None of us really got along that well. One of the kids I saw there all

the time made racist remarks constantly. Another kept promoting capitalism like it was a universal truth. None of us liked cliques: the preppies, the jocks, the mormons, the theater kids... there was even an art clique—kids that seemed like they were misfits on a much higher level which meant they were too cool for us. But then a name was born for us: the Darksiders. (Some of us wore black hoodies sometimes, and others had trenchcoats or leather jackets. Still there were a few who had bifocals and t-shirts with screenprinted wild animals on them. Some even had letter jackets, which were also black.) Really we just didn't belong anywhere. Any one person who was considered a Darksider had three friends in the group, tops. My friend and I started a newspaper called the Roseville Rebellion, which got the Darksider question circulating the school. The regular school newspaper started mentioning us, and the Pioneer Press did an article on the Rebellion. If you want to create something out of nothing, learn how to write and how to get cheap photocopies.

From as far back as I can remember, I took whatever I was interested in and just made my own. When I was in Kindergarten or something, I remember liking He-Man. Since we couldn't afford to buy all the action figures they had on the market, I learned how to draw He-Man and Skeletor, and I'd make paper cut outs. I got into the Monkees and the Beatles, and I used to make up my own songs while I was running hyperactively around the house. I made up a fake band and made fake records out of cardboard to go along with it. I titled all the songs I would make up and put them on the back of the sleeve. I must have been about seven years old. When I got into maps, I would copy maps. When I got

interested in credit cards and money I would copy credit cards and money. When I got into newspapers, I cut out articles and redesigned them into my own newspaper, which had my own comics and games in them. A friend of my mother's would photocopy it at work, and I'd drop the papers off at each of my siblings' bedroom doors. I remember how excited I would be when I saw the finished copy, even though I already knew what it looked like. It looked so much better printed. That may be the whole premise for my life—I want to make things that are just like the real thing, only mine. Well, I hope there's more to it than that.

One of the final things Afunctionul did as a group was the Zine Fest at the Rogue Buddha in the summer of 2003. Will and Valerie and I had gone to Bowling Green, Ohio about a month previous for the big Allied Media Conference, a two-day symposium on independent publishing. We took a whole bunch of zines and ideas home with us. I had run out of copies of the Afunctionul Manifesto over the weekend, so hopefully we left some ideas behind as well. We had some people at our zine fest. We met the people from the Fallout. I got to play some new songs in front of a few people. And we lost some money. It was a far stretch from our show in 2001, where we broke even. However, it was better than our show in 2002, where the gallery owner didn't pay the electric bill, and we had to hold our exhibit with a generator right out side the front door, making sure to fill it up with more gas every time the lights started to die.

While living in my one-room apartment, I used to make a nightly pilgrimage on foot down the seven-block stretch of 22nd Street to Caffetto Café. I have too many

songs relating to those walks, and too many memories. That stretch of road has seen the best and the worst of me. During my last winter in college, I would spend almost every night walking home at bar close from Mortimer's, drunk off at least a pitcher, with a Jack's pizza under my arm, after spending a couple of hours shooting my mouth off with Jeremiah Ninneman. He did more shooting than me. We talked about art, life, school, relationships, our friends, experiences, and all sorts of other stuff. Mortimer's is right across the street from Caffetto. I would start my walk around six or seven, grab a cup of coffee and work on papers, poems or projects. Then I'd run into him and whoever he was with, and whoever else happened to be around—Mourad, Sanaphay, Will, Angie, Eric, Cray, etc.,—and we'd go drink. I had federal student grants rolling in at the time. Spending the evening like that took the edge off of life. I think back with envy sometimes when I realize that back then, there wasn't that much of an edge. Today things are a lot harder. Certain things anyways. Hindsight I guess. I walked to the café with my head held high, and then I walked home from the bar six hours later with my gaze fixated forward. Usually I was freezing my ass off.

When Will and I moved into that house, we realized Afunctionul was doing less and less. We wanted to do more and more, especially after Bowling Green. So we got the group together and proposed a series of fundraisers. We turned our apartment into a gallery, invited the public, got a couple of kegs, and charged a $5 "suggested donation" at the door. The flyers said "Proceeds to Benefit the Afunctionul Arts Organization." We held the first one in October 2003, and made just

under $200 at the door. We also sold one piece, and the artist received payment in full.

The next exhibit happened in January 2004. The place was packed. We included artists from all over the city, and one from Savanannah, GA, and had a fairly well-rounded show. The owner of Artrujillo Gallery, to this day, still talks about what a good show that was. Every artist we had on display that night is openly invited to show at Artrujillo any time they want. I handled the space and the installation, and Will handled the publicity and the money.

I now wish I would've handled the money.

We had to kick Will out of the house in April of 2004. He hadn't paid rent since January. The individual who left the turd in the ashtray took his place.

By March, it was clear to me that all the money both from the door and from the artists' sales, was gone. Will stopped showing up at work, and had slowly nickel-and-dimed all of the proceeds. $600 is nothing when put into a person's living expense budget—but to a small arts organization, and especially to a broke one, $600 means a lot. I got a call the other day from one of the artists who sold some work, and who is now living in San Francisco. Him and one of my friends are considering legal action.

Will was long gone to upstate New York and we were not even through sorting out his stuff when I decided Afunctionul was over. It had been over for a while. We suffered the fate of the clique: to slowly

break apart. But the email address and the website were still there. So I just blocked those off. Mission accomplished. By that time, I was already managing the gallery at Stevens Square Center for the Arts and operating my studio. In May of 2004, we all moved out of that house. All of Will's stuff went down by the dumpsters. We got charged for it. I moved in with my girlfriend (another former afunctionul,) right across the street from my studio. Mourad and Jeremiah got a place in St. Louis Park. I don't know where John and Hocine ended up going, but I still see them both at Caffetto.

Sanaphay and I hung out a little recently. He expressed interest in playing music together sometime. I agreed that we should. I still see Adam, and Sarah quite a bit, and Valerie sometimes. As far as everybody else, who knows? I assume they are all doing something, trying to balance things, trying to make it worthwhile. I'm pretty sure everyone is doing just fine without Afunctionul.

The Walker Art Center has been closed since last winter. They started a major renovation at about the time I stopped working there, a couple years ago. Sanaphay, Cory, Jeremiah, and a handful of other people I knew had to find other jobs. I guess it wasn't that hard for them. I'm still floating, but that's me. I don't like working anyways. But the Walker wasn't work. It was standing around, watching people, reading the didactics, letting your mind wander. Even though you weren't supposed to, you could write, or sketch, or talk to the other guards if no one was looking. We learned to recognize the sound of the chief guard's keys, and would disperse when we heard them.

In the summer I'd get up, and bike to the Walker, work my shift and then bike to the café and sit there until someone wanted to go to the bar. I became a poet mostly because of those times in my life when I didn't like the isolation of my studio. Art is a lonely craft. I like sitting in a public place and working on something. Now I write zines.

The crowd at the Walker gradually meshed with the crowd from the University. That became Afunctionul, to tell the story short. Then gradually people left the Walker and/or graduated. So it goes.

I've worked in two different printing shops. I've worked at Kinko's. I still work for my Dad's rental property company. I've worked for him off and on since I was 15. At all of those jobs, I felt life tugging at me, saying, "this isn't life, you don't belong here." I hate working. I never got along with anyone I worked with, really. I mean, I could talk to some of them. But I never

had any need to after leaving the job. Those people were part of the job, and once the job was gone, so were they. The Walker was different. I made friends there. I made friends at the University. It seems like the more money you're making, the less you gain personally. Is that what the concept of work is supposed to be? Is it really my civic and patriotic duty as a participant of capitalism to cultivate a stale perception of the world, and work my ass off so I can afford to buy things that make it all seem worthwhile? Anyways, I don't understand how a couple of hours worth of recreation on the weekend can justify the 40+ you put in during the week.

I was only 24 for a year. This became clear when I turned 25, clearer when I turned 26, and is becoming still clearer as I look towards 27 and then 28. I've never committed myself to a career—not in my employment nor in my educational history—except for what I now do in my spare time. And I don't look at my mid-20's as my foolish youth of mistakes and experimentation. I think of them as a point in my life where everything clicked and fell into place. I was able to be myself. I didn't feel that way as a kid, or in high school, or in community college. I felt like I was underneath everything, and there was always something tugging at me. And then, I could be myself, and the tugging stopped. When everything clicks, you feel like you're on top of it. And then it passes, and you realize you better start struggling again.

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